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CIA CHIEF IMPRESSED BY SADDAM HUSSEIN'S ABILITY TO KEEP POWER  
 WASHINGTON, May 11, Reuter -

Retiring Central Intelligence Agency Director William Webster said on Saturday the United States is impressed by the ability of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to retain power in the face of his defeat in Kuwait.

Webster said in a Cable News Network interview that his agency had been accurate in forecasting the insurgencies that arose after the war.

But he said he was discouraged that Baathist leaders and Sunni groups with close access to Saddam "rallied behind him rather than see the insurgencies succeed."

Asked if he was caught by surprise by Saddam's ability to hang on, Webster said "I don't think 'caught by surprise' is an accurate way to describe it. I think we were impressed by it, but not surprised by it."

Webster, who announced this week that he will retire as CIA director, also said that during the war the United States had had cooperation from most of its allies in controlling terrorism.

"We did it," he said, "by identifying them (terrorists) in many parts of the world, having them arrested and interrogated, deported and ultimately in some cases confess."

Webster also said U.S. intelligence was building up its network of ground agents to back up its technical intelligence gathering, which uses the satellites and electronic intercepts.

Webster also said he did not see any return to the Cold War, despite the Soviet Union's regional and economic problems.

"Their internal problems are monumental and they're in no position to engage in adventurism against the West," he said.

Asked about possible future trouble spots, Webster cited the Koreas, India and Pakistan, the Pacific rim and Africa. He gave no details.

"We're the last definable superpower," he said, "and we'll be called upon to intervene in regional disputes, either diplomatically, militarily, or economically."